



# *The Life and Times of Olof Stille*



**HGDPC**

Historic Gloria Dei (Old Swedes')  
Preservation Corporation

# A LETTER FROM THE CHAIR

By Candace Roberts



Candace Roberts,  
Chair of the Board

Dear Friends,

The story you're about to read on New Sweden colonist Olof Stille has it all – life and death, love and intrigue, political resistance, a flight to New Sweden, and finally success!

In recent years, the term colonist has become associated with death, destruction, and subjugation. However, Olof and his fellow Swedish settlers embodied none of these attributes. They came for better, freer lives; but also, to trade peacefully and fairly with the Lenape. Olof was committed to justice and fairness. He was also a survivor, finding ways to work with the Dutch, and then the English as they came into power in this region. I think you will find this issue a perfect moment of enjoyable escape.

In future issues, we hope to highlight the lives of other Swedish Forefathers; defined by the Swedish Colonial Society as “members who can prove descent from Swedish or Finnish colonists in the United States prior to the Treaty of Paris, marking the close of the Revolutionary War in 1783.”

Meanwhile, here is a brief update on our Keystone Grant Project. The exterior of Riverside Hall has been repaired and painted. The interior of the Church has been repaired and painted. Much of the Church exterior work has been completed as well. As the weather got colder, work was moved to the inside and the exterior will be finalized as the temperature warms up. We could not be more delighted with the work of Materials Conservation for the superior quality and loving attention they have given our 300+ year old sanctuary!

It is not too late to make a donation to this project – or the next one – a new roof! With your help, Historic Gloria Dei can continue to care for this irreplaceable building from 1700; an important part of American history connecting the past to the present, and offering inspiration for future generations.

Respectfully submitted,  
Candace Roberts  
Chair of the Board



**About the Author:** Dr. Peter Stebbins Craig (1928-2009) was The Swedish Colonial Society's world-renowned historian and genealogist. The article that appears in this magazine was excerpted from "The Stille Family in America 1641-1772" and "Olof Persson Stille and his Family" (Swedish Colonial News, Vol. 1, No. 16), previously published by The Swedish Colonial Society. **It has been reprinted with permission.**

On the cover: "Landing of the Swedes, 1638" by Stanley M. Arthurs.



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## FOUNDERS MAGAZINE

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**Olof** Stille was born on the island of Solo in Roslagen, northeast of Stockholm, Sweden. He was the son of Per Stille, a relatively prosperous supervisor of the Penningby estate in Lanna parish. By 1627, Per Stille had retired and was granted land by the owners of Penningby on a nearby island called Humblö. Here Olof Stille married and began his family. Although Olof Stille was on good terms with Erik Bielke, who inherited Penningby in 1629, he did not think well of Bielke's wife, Lady Catarina Fleming.

At the Norrtälje fair in 1636, Olof Stille indiscreetly voiced his opinion of Lady Fleming, who retaliated by prosecuting Olof for defamation and took his property at Humblö. When Olof refused to leave the island, he was imprisoned. After securing his freedom, Olof and his family resettled in Matsunda, where he was joined by one of his former servants named Anders. Lady Fleming, now a widow, had Anders seized on Mar. 18, 1638 and imprisoned at Penningby under the claim that Anders had broken a verbal agreement with the late Lord Bielke to be their servant.

Olof Stille heard the news the next day, entered Penningby Castle by a secret door, broke the lock to the dungeon with his axe and then fled, with Anders carrying the axe and Olof his own rapier. On complaint from Lady Fleming, the Governor issued an order for Olof Stille's arrest on Mar. 28, 1638 - the same day that the first expedition to New Sweden was landing at the Rocks. At the trial on Apr. 13, 1638, Olof Stille was convicted of burglary and sentenced to death by the sword. The appellate court, however, modified the sentence to a fine of 100 daler silver money, the equivalent of 17 months pay for a New Sweden soldier.

Three years later, on May 3, 1641, when the *Charitas* departed Stockholm for New Sweden, the passenger list included Olof Stille, a mill-maker, his wife, a 7-year-old daughter and a son

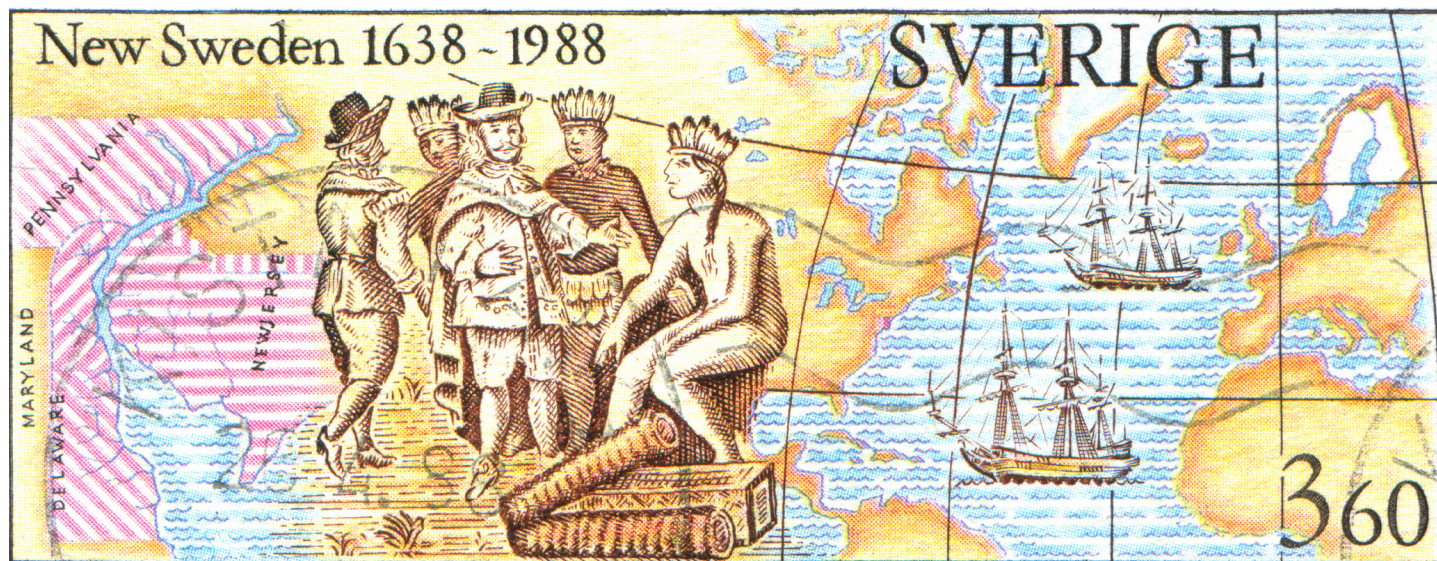
18 months old. Also on board were Olof's younger brother Axel Stille, and the family of Mäns Svensson Lom, whose wife appears to have been Olof's younger sister. His older brother, Johan Stille, later pastor at Fundbo (1644-1672), and his sister Kerstin remained in Sweden.

The first leg of the trip to New Sweden was to Gothenburg, where the *Charitas* joined the ship *Kalmar Nyckel*. The two ships departed for New Sweden in July. After a stormy voyage, during which two colonists and a number of cattle died, the *Charitas* and the *Kalmar Nyckel* arrived at Fort Christina (present Wilmington, Delaware) in November 1641. There they were met by a handful of settlers who had preceded them to Sweden's three-year-old colony on the South (Delaware) River.

Olof and Axel Stille did not remain long at Fort Christina. With the arrival in 1643 of Governor Johan Björnsson Printz and more settlers, the population of New Sweden swelled to about 180, permitting the expansion of settlement northward as far as the Schuylkill River in present Pennsylvania. Olof settled as a freeman at a place called Techoherassi by the Indians, located between present Crum Creek and Ridley Creek (called Olof Stille's Creek) in the borough of Eddystone, Pennsylvania. Joining him at this location were his brother Axel and the Lom family.

The Indians were frequent visitors to Techoherassi and liked Olof Stille very much, but they considered his heavy, black beard a monstrosity and conferred a strange name on him because of it.

As the only known mill-maker in the colony, Olof Stille probably was in charge of building the first Swedish gristmill on Mill (now Cobbs) Creek. He also became a leader in the colony, serving as a judge at Fort Christina. On Jul. 10, 1643, he presided over the trial of George Lamberton from the English New Haven colony, who was prosecuted by Governor Printz for trying to establish an English settlement on the South River. On Oct. 6,



Obverse of a 1936 Delaware Swedish tercentenary commemorative half dollar. United States Mint/Carl L. Schmitz (inset).  
Postage stamp celebrating the 350th anniversary of Swedish settlements in America (above).

**1610**

Olof Stille is born in Roslagen, Sweden. His father, Per, is a relatively prosperous supervisor of the Penningby estate in Länna parish.

**1627**

Upon retirement, the owners of Penningby grant Per a property on the island of Humblö. Olof and his wife move there and start a family.

**1629**

Olof is on good terms with Penningby's new owner Erik Bielke ... but he does not care for Bielke's wife, Catarina Fleming.

**1636**

Olof indiscreetly voices his opinion of Fleming. She retaliates by reclaiming Humblö. Olof refuses to leave and is imprisoned. After securing his freedom, he moves to Matsunda and is joined by a former servant named Anders.

**1638**

Fleming, now a widow, has Anders imprisoned at Penningby. She claims that Anders broke an agreement with her late husband. Olof enters Penningby through a secret door and breaks Anders out of the dungeon. Olof is arrested and put on trial. He is convicted of burglary and sentenced to death by sword. His sentence is soon lessened by the appellate court to a fine.

**1641**

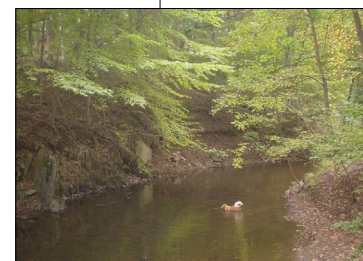
Olof and his wife and children depart for New Sweden on the Charitas. Also on board is Olof's younger brother Axel Stille.

**1642**

In New Sweden, Olof settles as a freeman at a place called Techoherassi by the Indians, located between present Crum Creek and Ridley Creek.

**1643**

Johan Björnsson Printz becomes Governor of New Sweden. He secures a monopoly of trade with the Indians; the Swedish colony prospers.



1646, Olof Stille and Mäns Svensson Lom were chosen by Governor Printz to deliver a diplomatic protest to Andries Hudde, who was then New Netherland's principal officer on the South River. By 1648, however, Olof Stille had fallen out of favor with Governor Printz. In that year, Olof bought a calf from a Swedish minister who was returning to Sweden. Immediately after the minister departed, Printz seized the calf despite Olof Stille's objections that he had a written receipt proving his ownership.

Governor Printz was an autocratic administrator, frequently clashing with his subjects. As the objections to Printz' rule multiplied, Olof Stille became a leader in a move to try to correct matters. In 1653, a complaint was drafted and delivered to Printz, which outlined a series of grievances. Twenty-two freemen signed the complaint, headed by the names of Mats Hansson, Olof Stille and Axel Stille. Other names on the complaint, then or later connected with the Stille family, included John Hwiler (Wheeler), Peter Jochim (Jochimsson) and Hans Mansson. Printz considered this petition an act of "mutiny," accusing one of the signers (Olof Stille) and two non-signers (Pastor Lock and a soldier Anders Jonsson) of being ringleaders in this "rebellion." He summarily executed Anders Jonsson by a firing squad on Aug. 1, 1653 and scheduled the other two for trial at the next court. Printz, however, did not stay around for the trial. Within a month, he packed up and left for Sweden, taking many of New Sweden's soldiers with him. In his absence, he left the task of governing New Sweden to his son-in-law, Johan Papegoja, husband of Armegot Printz.

Fearing retaliation for the expression of their views, 15 of New Sweden's freemen decided to flee. Papegoja hired Indians

to bring back the escapees, dead or alive, and the severed heads of two of them were brought back. Among the thirteen escapees who kept their heads were Axel Stille and John Hwiler.

Olof Stille remained in New Sweden. He was on hand in 1654 to greet the next (and last) governor of New Sweden, Johan Rising, who arrived with many new settlers in May of that year. On or about Jun. 9, 1654 at Tinicum Island, Olof Stille, Peter Jochimsson, Hans Mansson and the widow of Mäns Svensson Lom were four of the "old freemen" (i.e., in New Sweden before Rising's arrival) who signed an oath of allegiance to the Swedish crown. At the first court over which Rising presided, he reports in his journal:

"26 June 1654-(Monday)- We, the aforesaid [Governor Rising, Sven Skute and Johan Papegoja], went together to Tinicum and held court there, where most of our freemen [are], and many cases were presented. The priest, Mr. Lars Lock was also accused by Governor Printz according to the said Memorial, and also the freeman named Olof Stille, that they had been involved in a mutiny that one by the name of Anders Jonsson had instigated, whom Governor Printz had caused to be shot by firing squad for it. But the priest, Mr. Lars Lock, proved by witnesses that Anders Jonsson had at his last breath absolved him; therefore, he could not be held guilty of it. But, otherwise, it was deemed necessary to send him home by the ship to explain himself in the presence of Gov. Printz. Olof Stille put up personal bond and wanted to go to trial."

Previously, on Trinity Sunday 1654, Governor Rising had made the tactical mistake of capturing a new Dutch fort, Fort Casimir, at present New Castle, Delaware. This action so up-

1645

As the only known mill-maker in the colony, Olof probably builds the first Swedish gristmill on Mill (now Cobbs) Creek.



1653

Printz denies the freemen land rights and trade rights. Olof and others issue a letter of petition to the Swedish government.



1654

Printz labels this action mutiny and promptly leaves for Sweden. Johan Rising is appointed Governor. Olof asks for a prompt trial. Rising takes a more kindly view toward the freemen and lets the matter drop.



1655

The Dutch claim control of the colony. Swedes and Finns living north of the Christina River are allowed to govern themselves.



1656

Olof Stille is appointed Chief Justice of the first Swedish court. For the next eight years, he adjudicates conflicts between the Swedes and the Dutch.



1664

After retiring as chief justice, Olof moves to Moyamensing. Even in retirement, he is called upon to arbitrate disputes among the settlers.



1684

Olof dies. He is probably buried in the Gloria Dei (Old Swedes') Churchyard.

1692

Wolley Stille, an estate in Delaware County, is built and named for Olof. This national historic treasure still stands today.



set Governor Peter Stuyvesant at New Amsterdam (New York) that over a year later, in August 1655, seven ships and several hundred Dutch soldiers descended on New Sweden and forced the end of Sweden's colonial venture in America.

Although given the opportunity to do so, Olof Stille did not return to Sweden with Governor Rising. Instead, he remained with his family at Techoharassi. Under Stuyvesant's rule, the "up-river" Swedes and Finns, namely those living on the Delaware north of Fort Christina (renamed Fort Altena by the Dutch) were granted liberal rights of quasi self-government. Undoubtedly with Stuyvesant's approval, Olof Stille became one of the original justices or magistrates who governed this "up-river" Swedish "nation." On May 8, 1658 Stuyvesant personally visited the leaders of this community at Tinicum Island. At this meeting, Olof Stille and the other magistrates made their requests known (which Stuyvesant granted) and "renewed their allegiance" to Stuyvesant's rule.

Under Dutch rule, Olof Stille had a very active career as a justice or magistrate of the up-river Swedes. In April 1660, William Beeckman, Stuyvesant's deputy on the South River, reported:

"Oele Stille clashed with me strongly last court day because I made the accusation that he had illegally authorized the priest [Lars Carlsson Lock] in his presence to marry a young couple without posting banns in church, and against the will of their parents. Therefore I fined the priest 50 guilders to which Oele Stille objected, saying that it was not in our province to judge such matters but that it had to be done by the Consistory of Sweden, and that we had nothing to do with the priest."

Shortly thereafter, Beeckman deputized Stille to go to Mary-

land to try to persuade deserting Swedes and Finns to return to the South River. On Feb. 5, 1661 Beeckman reported to Stuyvesant:

"Oele Stille, one of our magistrates, has also arrived here from Maryland with some Finns. They had gone there, as I am informed, to take up land to go there in the spring to live. The schout, Van Dyck, did not inform me of their departure. After finding that their countrymen in the Sassafras River were in difficulty, they gave up their venture and Oele Stille says that perhaps all of the Finns living there may return here."

Olof Stille was unsuccessful in persuading his own brother, Axel Stille, to return to the Delaware at this time. However, among those whom he did persuade to return was one Jacob Jongh (Young) of Gothenburg. Jacob was soon to cause a major scandal among the "up-river" Swedes. On Sept. 9, 1661 he eloped with the wife of Pastor Lars Carlsson Lock. The latter, in a frenzy, rushed to Jongh's room and rummaged through Jongh's trunk, looking for evidence. Beeckman, who had loaned Jongh money, placed Lock on trial and Olof Stille was among the justices hearing the case at Fort Altena on Apr. 4, 1662. The court ruled that the minister should be heavily fined for breaking and entering, plus other fines for his "insolence." Additionally, Beeckman condemned Lock for having in the meantime remarried – to Beata, the daughter of Mäns Svensson Lom – especially since he had not yet obtained a legal divorce from his first wife from Governor Stuyvesant.

A year later, on Mar. 28, 1663, Olof Stille was also a member of the court for the trial of Evert "Iver the Finn" Hendricksson for his assault on Jurgen Kuhn at Upland. The court decided

that the matter was of sufficient gravity to forward the case to Peter Stuyvesant in New Amsterdam. Stuyvesant wanted to ban Evert Hendricksson from the South River for this assault. However, Stuyvesant no longer had effective control over the South River. In order to pay for debts incurred in the 1655 conquest of New Sweden, his superiors at the Dutch West India Company had transferred to the City of Amsterdam all lands in present Delaware on the west side of the Delaware River between Christina River and Bombay Hook.

This new colony, known as New Amstel, provided refuge for Iver the Finn within its boundaries at Crane Hook. Furious, Beeckman reported to Stuyvesant on Aug. 26, 1663:

"About six weeks ago at New Amstel, he [Evert Hendricksson] treated one of our magistrates in a very insulting manner on the street, and ten days ago at Opland [Upland] challenged another magistrate to a fight, causing once more an uproar. At the suggestion of Oele Stille, I went there at once. Upon my arrival, Iver de Fin fled into the woods and refused to come out....He [proclaims] that you have given him permission to live wherever he wants."

Stuyvesant's rule of the upper part of the South River came to an end in 1663 when the Dutch West India Company conveyed the remainder of its Delaware River holdings to the City of Amsterdam, whose appointed governor, Alexander D'Hinoyossa, issued Olof Stille his first proof of ownership of land in America. On Jun. 3, 1664, D'Hinoyossa, "Governor of the South River in America," granted to Martin Clensmith, William Stille and Laurens Andrews a patent for a tract known as Moyamensing, located in present South Philadelphia. Martin Clensmith was Dutch; "William" was the Dutch and English version of the Swedish name "Olof," often "Oele," which evolved through "Wooley" to "William" for most of the Swedes so named; the third co-owner was Lars (or Lasse) Andersson Collinu, who had arrived from Sweden in 1654 with Governor Rising as a muster-clerk and had married the widow of Mäns Svensson Lom shortly thereafter.

Having lived in America under the flags of Sweden, the Dutch West India Company and the City of Amsterdam, Olof Stille witnessed another change of power in 1664 when an English fleet, under the direction of the Duke of York (later King James II of England), forced D'Hinoyossa to surrender the Delaware to the English crown. This action did not much affect Olof Stille. He continued to serve as a magistrate of the up-river Swedes, whose court had been moved from Tinicum Island to Upland. By 1675, after almost 20 years of service on the only court in present Pennsylvania, Olof Stille had retired.

Upon his arrival in America in 1682, William Penn required

all residents to surrender their former Dutch or English patents and to have their lands resurveyed for the issuance of new, more precisely worded patents. The D'Hinoyossa 1664 patent for Moyamensing was delivered to Penn's agents on Jun. 13, 1683. A warrant to resurvey the land was issued to its then owners, identified as Lasse Andrews (Collinu), William (Olof) Stille, Andrew Bankson (Bengtsson) and John Mattsson. After the survey, a patent was issued to the same foursome dated Jul. 21, 1684 describing the Moyamensing tract as being 525 acres plus 63 acres of marshland.



*Olof Stille's legacy is cemented on a plaque dedicated to the Swedish settlements on the Delaware. It is located at the southern entrance to the Philadelphia City Hall.*

If Olof Stille was still alive in 1683-84, he was probably in very poor health. It appears certain, however, that he was dead by 1685 when Thomas Holme's map of Philadelphia shows John Stille, his son, as the owner of the property in Moyamensing. The same map also identifies Olof Stille's former property on Ridley Creek. Labeled "Preest" on the map, it was then owned by Pastor Lars Carlsson Lock. The former Olof Stille's Creek had by this time been renamed "Preest (priest) Creek." Soon Ridley Creek would be renamed, and evidence of the original Swedish settlement would be forgotten.

No will or other paper dealing with the death of Olof Stille has been discovered. The name of his wife is not known. However, it is evident that he had at least three children who grew to maturity in America. Two of these (Ella and Anders) had been born in Sweden; the third (John) was born in New Sweden. Additionally, he had at least eleven grandsons and at least 49 great grandsons.

Around 1720, a copy of a letter that John Stille inherited from Olof was

transcribed and saved for posterity. It reads as follows:

The late Oluf Persson Stille's Passport here to the so-called New Sweden (Dec. 2, 1634):

"I, Erich Bielke of Wyk, Penningby and Nynas, hereby put into writing that the person showing this Passport, Oluf Persson Stille, has for several years been employed in my service, and conducted himself honorably and well in that position, so that I have nothing to charge against him; and since he has now set his mind on trying his hand in other places, for which purpose he has in great humility applied to me for gracious permission, which I have not wanted to refuse him, but have indulged; therefore requesting the friendly favor of those good lords and men he may chance to meet, and to whom he may present himself, that they inflict on him no obstacles nor imprisonment, but rather for my sake, recommend him for the best and promote him; to such I shall be very much obliged. In certification of this I have signed it with my own hand, and sealed it with my personal signet."

- By Peter S. Craig

# THE YEAR IN REVIEW

2020

## OUR MISSION

Gloria Dei is the oldest surviving church building in Pennsylvania. Beginning in 1667 when a blockhouse on the site was converted into a house of worship, our founders envisioned a place of beauty, tranquility and inspiration. Today, the Gloria Dei Episcopal Church congregation stewards this historic space surrounded by a National Park, preserving New Sweden's history and the stories of the over 5000 people buried here. **Historic Gloria Dei Preservation Corporation was formed to fund, support, and supervise the restoration and renovation of the buildings, grounds, and churchyard.** As we endeavor to achieve these goals, we will do so with great sensitivity to our historic beginnings and landscape.

## OUR WORK



Our Keystone Grant Project is nearing completion. Multi award-winning company, Materials Conservation, is repairing and painting Gloria Dei Church and Riverside Hall. **You can still support this project by making a donation which will be 100% matched** by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.



We published a comprehensive **map** of all of the visible gravestones in our churchyard. Paper versions of this map are available for free outside the front door to the church. An interactive version designed for smartphones and tablets can be accessed at [www.preserveoldswedes.org/churchyard](http://www.preserveoldswedes.org/churchyard).



To comply with COVID restrictions, our "Great Talks at Gloria Dei" **lecture series** was converted into a live-streamed conference series. Attendees were treated to talks by several esteemed local archivists, historians and preservationists. Over 200 people attended these virtual programs.

With these reports and plans in place, we continued our **outreach and communication** efforts. Here are some highlights:



We launched a free **podcast** to complement our "Great Talks" lecture series.



We curated a free **museum** exhibit dedicated to the 1980 disappearance of the SS Poet.



Our historians wrote **biographical sketches** on many of our "permanent residents."



We sent e-news every month and published three issues of **Founders Magazine**.

## LOOKING AHEAD

- We are **updating our churchyard map** to include the known final resting places for all confirmed internments. This will help visitors locate the exact locations where their ancestors were buried, even if their headstones are missing.
- We are **growing our contact list** regionally and across the country.
- New trustee, Mary Ryan, is creating a firm foothold for us in **social media** — please follow us on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter.
- The planning stages are underway for **videos and walking tours** to enhance our visitor experience.
- We will work to meet our **fundraising goals** through donations and grants.
- We are actively **recruiting** additional **volunteers** for our various programs.
- We are designing interpretive signage to help tell the stories about individuals buried in our churchyard.

# 100 FOUNDING MEMBERS

## *Supporting Our Foundation*

*This program is offered to the first 100 individuals who pay \$1,000 or pledge \$1,000, to be paid quarterly or monthly over 12 consecutive months. (There is still room to make this list!)*

- Kristina Antoniadis, MD
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- Terry Brasko
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- Jerome Buescher
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- Christine Pickup
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- Candace Roberts
- Mark Roberts
- Eric Michael Sanchez
- David E. Sandels
- Alan Segal
- Rev. Joy Segal
- Pamela Sjogren
- Wade Sjogren
- *in honor of* the Founding Lutheran Ministers (1697-1831): Andreas Rudman, Johan Dylander, Gabriel Nasman, Olof Parlin, Carl Magnus Wrangel, Nils Collin
- The Swedish Colonial Society
- Margaretha Talerman
- Rev. Dr. Kim-Eric Williams
- Jeanette Woehr



**HGDPC**

Historic Gloria Dei (Old Swedes')  
Preservation Corporation

*The Historic Gloria Dei (Old Swedes') Preservation Corporation was established to fund, support, and supervise the restoration, renovation, and ongoing maintenance of the Gloria Dei (Old Swedes') Church buildings, grounds, and graveyard so that future generations may share in this historic and architectural treasure. **All contributions are tax-deductible to the extent allowed by law.***

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